

LABOUR MARKET NEWS

Alberta Employment, Immigration
and Industry

CENTRAL



2007 - Year in review

Coming off the boom of the past few years, Central Alberta's economy began a gradual cool down in 2007.

After two record-setting years, the oil and gas industry took a hit with Alberta drilling completions dropping by 26 per cent and many companies laying off workers.

The soaring Canadian dollar created concerns for manufacturing companies, farmers and the forestry industry, while businesses in many sectors continued to feel the effects of an ongoing labour shortage. With the demand for workers, the region's 2007 unemployment rate was a low 2.9 per cent, below the provincial average of 3.5 per cent (see page 7).

Challenges

Despite the challenges, the region was still able to weather what some described as a "perfect economic storm."

The slowdown in oil and gas and the loonie's growth dampened export profitability, and manufacturers struggled and looked at opportunities to diversify their business outside the oil and gas market.

Construction continued to boom, with Red Deer, Sylvan Lake and several other Central Alberta communities posting record-breaking building permit numbers. Residential development was especially strong, propelled by a growing population (see January 2007 In the News).

Commercial and non-commercial service industries, such as retail, accommodations, food services, health care and education saw investment in new facilities and projects.

"A lot of other industries, like construction, have been pretty strong. They picked up the slack," says local businessman Frank Tirpak.

Tyler Westover, economic development specialist for Red Deer Regional Economic Development, agrees. The organization represents the city and county of Red Deer, Red Deer College and the Red Deer Chamber of Commerce.

"There is a fair amount of industry in the region that is geared towards oil and gas, but we do have a fair amount of industry that is not necessarily oil and gas related, so that has buffered us well," says Westover.

With the overheated economy of the past few years, a cooling off may not be a bad thing. "It's more of a normalization than anything, instead of such a crazy pace that everyone got so used to," says Westover.

Industry analysis

This edition of the Labour Market News includes the second annual review of major economic and labour market events in Central Alberta for 2007. Over the next five pages, the following industries will be reviewed:

- Oil and gas
- Manufacturing
- Construction
- Retail
- Health care
- Education
- Tourism, accommodation and food

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YEAR IN REVIEW

oil & gas

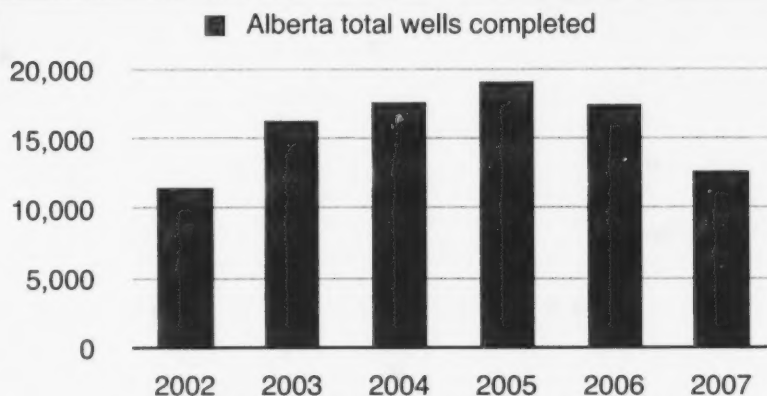
A slowdown in oil and gas drilling activity that began in the last quarter of 2006 continued in 2007.

"We had roughly 26 per cent less drilling in 2007 versus 2006. Mainly the biggest drop was in the natural gas side of the business," says Frank Tirpak, chairman of the Petroleum Services Association of Canada (PSAC) and president of Lonkar Services, a Red Deer oil and gas service company.

Compared to the record-breaking 23,300 wells drilled in 2006 and 24,800 in 2005, PSAC estimates there were 17,550 wells drilled in Canada in 2007.

PSAC estimates about 10,000 workers, mainly in Alberta, were laid off in the oil and gas drilling and service sectors in 2007. This would have had a substantial impact on Central Alberta, which is a major hub for oil and gas exploration and oilfield services. Tirpak says many people weren't prepared for the drop. "We never believed it was going to slow down," he notes.

Companies had to tighten their belts and mergers were also in the cards. In November, one of Red Deer's



Source: Petroleum Services Association of Canada

largest employers, Collicutt Energy Services, was sold to Finning International Inc. for \$145 million.

Tirpak says the slowdown gives oil and gas companies room to breathe after several years of high costs and labour shortages. "I don't think we could have continued on the pace we were going. Something needed to be done," he says.

Even with a slowdown, local companies were still investing in the region:

- Nabors Production Services started construction on a new Central Alberta head office and shop complex in Sylvan Lake.

- Renovations were underway at Bowden's oil refinery to bring the plant up to full operations after a five-year hiatus.
- Diversified Industries, of B.C., relocated its head office to Red Deer to be closer to oil and gas services. The company distributes chemicals to run rigs.
- Construction started on Precision Drilling's new \$16 million facility north of Red Deer.
- Lonkar Services began the first phase of its expansion. The 21,600-square-foot facility will have a shop, office and cold storage.

retail

New shopping centres and big-box retailers continued to pop up across Central Alberta in 2007, with several chain stores entering the market or expanding their presence in the region. More than \$250 million in commercial and retail projects were in the planning or construction stages in the region last year (not including projects under \$5 million). Highlights include:

- Crews started work on the Cornerstone Shopping Centre in Olds. The total project is valued at \$80 million. Phase one includes development of a Wal-Mart, Canadian Tire and Sobeys grocery store.



A Sears store is being built at Bower Place mall.

- Construction began on a \$6.2 million Sears store at Bower Place mall in Red Deer, part of a three-year, \$40 million renovation and expansion project at the mall that neared completion in 2007.

- In Sylvan Lake, two shopping centres were under construction, one in Ryders Ridge worth \$10 million and another in the Beju Industrial Park worth \$50 million. Anchor tenants for Ryders Ridge include Sobeys and Shoppers Drug Mart, while the Beju Industrial Park project will include a Wal-Mart.
- Construction began on a 55,000 square foot home improvement retail centre at Gasoline Alley in Red Deer County. Tenants include Ashley Furniture and other home decor stores.
- In Red Deer, work began on a new \$10 million shopping centre at 22 Street and Taylor Drive.

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construction

For the construction industry, the upward momentum of the last few years continued in 2007. Several municipalities broke records for building permit values.

Across the region, a large variety of residential, commercial, industrial and institutional projects were proposed or under construction, including several affordable housing projects, seniors residences and condo developments.

Record breaking year

City of Red Deer hit a record \$421 million in building permits, up \$139 million over the 2006 record of \$282 million.

Sylvan Lake hit a record \$125.3 million in building permits, up from \$78.3 million in 2006. Other communities to set new records for building permit values include Camrose, Rocky Mountain House, Ponoka and Drayton Valley.



Other highlights for 2007

- Work began on Executive Place, a \$27 million, 12-story office town in downtown Red Deer.
- Construction neared completion on Landmark Cinemas, a \$10 million movie theatre in Gasoline Alley in Red Deer County.
- Masterpiece Construction started a 154-unit, \$15.5 million seniors residence in Red Deer's Inglewood neighbourhood.

- The City of Red Deer began construction on its \$118 million civic yards relocation.
- Queens Business Park, a new industrial park in Red Deer, began to take shape west of Highway 2 and south of Highway 11.
- Laebon Developments began construction of a \$16.5 million condo project in Red Deer.
- Lancaster Developments started work on a \$16.5 million, 100-unit apartment block in Red Deer.

manufacturing

Manufacturing saw many ups and downs in 2007. The slowdown in conventional oil and gas and the high Canadian dollar affected the industry in Central Alberta.

Tyler Westover with Red Deer Regional Economic Development says the slowdown in oil and gas affected the region. "That, along with the increasing dollar, was almost a double whammy for some of the manufacturers in the region," he says.

Expanding markets

Westover says that some manufacturers were able to diversify their businesses. "We saw some of the manufacturers starting to diversify their portfolios, so they wouldn't have to rely on oil and gas so much. I know of a few companies that were fabricating tanks for the oil and gas industry, and they started fabricating trailers, so that opens their market."

Mark L. Burggren with CARIN (Central Alberta Region Innovation Network) says some companies have recovered from the slowdown in conventional drilling. Others that relied heavily on the industry have suffered. "I know that one manufacturer closed down because of the loss of business," he says.

The high Canadian dollar did affect some manufacturers that export products, but Westover says that manufacturers in the region have adjusted and the majority of business is done right here in the province.

Layoffs

While Central Alberta hasn't reached the numbers of layoffs in other



Canadian regions, Westover says there are some concerns. "One good thing that has come out of this is that we're seeing manufacturers trying to diversify what they're manufacturing. It's helping out with innovation and lean principles. It's a catalyst to changing the minds of people in those companies affected," he says.

However, he adds that the Labour Force Survey revealed that manufacturers were happy with the region in terms of quality of life and a community to do business.

New facilities 2007

- Shaw Pipe Protection in Camrose is building a new, state-of-the-art coating facility. The \$30 million project was announced by parent-company ShawCor Energy Services in October. This project will help the company meet growing demand.
- A \$1.2 million expansion at Bilton Welding and Manufacturing in Innisfail is complete.

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agriculture

The past year was one of highs and lows for Central Alberta farmers. While they benefited from high crop prices, farmers also faced low livestock prices along with high feed, fuel and fertilizer costs. The strong Canadian dollar was also cause for concern, especially for cattle and hog exports. Between January and December, it's estimated Western Canadian hog producers lost \$20 to \$25 a hog due to the dollar's appreciation, although prices started to rebound at the end of the year.

In 2007, an influx of companies announced multi-million dollar biofuel projects in Central Alberta, attracted to the region by its central location and the availability of feedstock crops. The plants will create new markets for local farmers. Proposed projects include:

- The Town of Rimbey and an investors group have proposed a \$30 to \$35 million plant that would produce 27 million litres of ethanol annually by converting straw and municipal waste. The plant would employ 25 to 50 people.
- Alberta Ethanol and Biodiesel LP plans to build a \$400 million plant north of Innisfail. Annual production would be 379 million litres each of ethanol and biodiesel, made from wheat and canola. The plant would employ 90 people. A



canola seed crushing facility is also part of the project. When complete, the refinery will be the largest facility of its kind in North America.

- Greenlab Energy is planning a \$190 million biofuel plant east of Stettler. It will rely on local farmers for 27 million bushels of canola each year—enough to produce 300 million litres of biofuel annually. The plant will also produce animal feed pellets and have a biofuel research facility.
- BioNex Energy Corp. plans to build a plant on the Olds College Campus that would use seed oil from local farmers to produce 20 million litres of biodiesel annually. In May, the college opened its own BioFuel Technology Centre, a

research facility that will produce up to one million litres of biodiesel each year.

- The Permolex ethanol plant in Red Deer is looking to build a second plant, adding from 100 to 150 million litres of capacity.

Other highlights for 2007

At the end of November, the US border reopened to live Canadian cattle born after March 1999 and meat products from these cattle. The border had been closed to such shipments for more than four years after a mad-cow disease scare in May 2003.

Also in November, almost 30 farms in Alberta and B.C., including some in Central Alberta, were put under quarantine after bovine tuberculosis was discovered in a bull from B.C. The farm where the bull lived sold almost 400 head of cattle through the Innisfail Auction Mart this summer. The auctioned animals were destroyed and no new cases of the disease have been found.

A new 32,000-square-foot meat packing plant opened in Lacombe. Canadian Premium Meats can slaughter 120-head of beef, bison and elk per day and employs 20 people. Meanwhile, plans by South River Foods to build an \$18.5 million meat packing plant in Lacombe were cancelled due to high construction costs.

health care

As the region's population grows, so does the need for health care services. One of the biggest challenges for the David Thompson Health Region (DTHR) continues to be attracting and retaining staff.

The region currently employs approximately 9,000 people in 54 facilities, including hospitals, community health centres, mental health centres and continuing care centres. In the 2006-07 fiscal year,

about 2,200 staff were hired to replace employees who left.

To deal with staffing issues, the region has around 30 recruitment programs pending or underway.

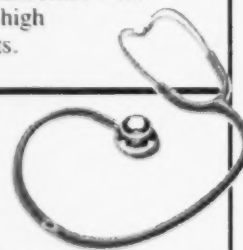
"These range from advertising campaigns to financial incentives to student initiatives to mentorship programs to local, provincial and international recruitment efforts," says Karmen Fittes, the region's recruiting services project leader.

Nursing positions continue to be some of the most difficult jobs to fill.

On average, the region has 80 to 90 jobs posted for each month for registered nurses; 60 to 70 jobs for licenced practical nurses and 40 to 50 jobs for health care aides.

The region serves 300,000 people. To keep up with the increasing demand for health care services, the DTHR undertook several capital projects in 2007.

Continued on next page



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- The new Drayton Valley Community Health Centre opened. The facility lets Drayton Valley and area residents access all community health services, such as public health and home care, under one roof.
- Construction continued on the new \$21 million Rimbey hospital, set to open in December 2008. The 60-year-old Rimbey hospital will be replaced with a larger, modern hospital.
- Johnstone Crossing Community Health Centre in Red Deer neared completion in 2007. The \$9.7 million centre will help relieve overcrowding at the Bremner Avenue Community Health Centre.

Construction also began on Riverlands Medical Centre in Red



Johnstone Crossing Community Health Centre in Red Deer, expected to open in March 2008.

Deer. The 26,000-square-foot, \$9 million facility will bring together several health services in one location. The project is being spearheaded by a local group of orthopedic surgeons. They will work

out of the centre, which will also be home to the Central Alberta Hip and Knee Clinic, Red Deer Regional Hospital's cast clinic, an X-ray lab, a radiology clinic and a physiotherapy clinic.

education

Several Central Alberta school districts and post-secondary institutions were busy with expansion, renovation and new building projects in 2007.

Red Deer College

Work continued on Phase 1 of a \$110 million Building Communities Through Learning expansion at Red Deer College. In May, a new automotive service technician shop was completed and at the end of August, a new welding shop opened its doors to students. The extra space allowed the college to expand its trades programming in 2007, adding 1,200 apprenticeship seats mostly in the heavy equipment technician and welding trades.

Construction is also underway on a 172,000-square-foot main building, which will house new centres for trades and technology, innovation and manufacturing, business enterprise and visual arts. Planning continued on Phase 2 of the project, which will add a new Centre for Regional Sport and



Wellness and a Centre for Health Education.

Olds College

Construction neared completion on the Bell eLearning Centre at Olds College, part of a \$58 million Community Learning Campus joint project between the college and the Chinook's Edge School Division. The eLearning Centre, an innovative technological hub, is set to open in early 2008.

A bus maintenance facility for Chinook's Edge also opened in fall. Another phase of the project, a fine arts and multi-media facility, began to take shape in early 2007.

Chinook's new Grade 9 to 12 high school and an adjacent health and wellness facility were also under construction in 2007.

Augustana Campus

In May, construction began on a new \$13.2 million library at the University of Alberta's Augustana Campus in Camrose. A new \$16.8 million gathering space on campus, called the Augustana Forum, is also planned.

Other highlights for 2007

- Our Lady of the Rosary, a new \$8.4 million Catholic elementary school, opened in Sylvan Lake in November.
- An \$18.5 million major modernization of Lacombe Composite high school went into full swing in 2007. A new administrative area, a library, gym and heating system are part of the project, along with extensive renovations.
- In September construction began on Holy Trinity Academy, a \$13.9 million high school in Drayton Valley.

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tourism, accommodation & food services

More people are discovering the wide range of attractions, events and accommodations Central Alberta has to offer. The Central Alberta region accounts for more than 20 per cent of all tourism visits to Alberta. In 2007, the Red Deer Tourism Centre alone had 68,700 visitors.

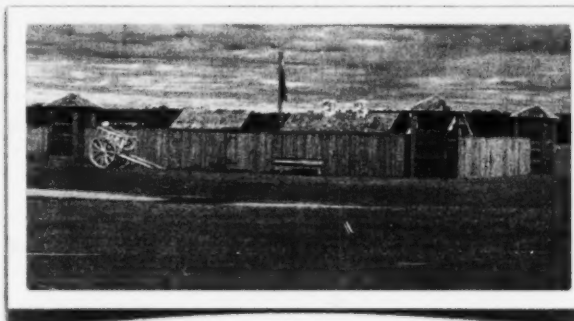
Museums, historic sites, golf courses and plenty of scenic lakes, rivers and parks attract visitors from across Western Canada and beyond. Visitors have a growing number of accommodation options, thanks to several new hotels and motels which got underway in 2007. In Drayton Valley, six hotels and motels were under construction or in the planning stages in 2007, adding 478 rooms at a development cost of \$24.1 million. Also being built:

- A hotel and convention centre next to the new Camrose Resort Casino, which opened in June.
- A \$7 million Super 8 motel in Camrose.
- A \$3 million Best Western and a \$2.1 million Econo Lodge in Innisfail.
- In Olds, a Ramada Inn.

Labour shortages continued to be challenge for hotels and restaurants, with some hiring foreign workers to meet their staffing needs.

Other highlights for 2007

- Red Deer hosted the 2007 Telus Cup National Midget AAA Hockey Championships April 23 to 29. Six teams from across Canada competed. Besides the players and their families, the games drew thousands of fans and scouts from the Western Hockey League. "We drew some 30,000 people, with the final game drawing a record 4,700 people," says organizing committee



Renovations began on the Rocky Mountain House National Historic Site visitor centre.

chairman Marvin Siebel. "It had a very big impact on tourism. We brought a lot of people to the region."

- A \$1.4 million renovation project began at the Rocky Mountain House National Historic Site visitor centre. New exhibits, an upgraded theatre and expanded gift shop are part of a total \$2.9 million upgrade of the site.
- The Ponoka Stampede June 26 to July 2 had a record-breaking attendance with 75,550 spectators through its gates, up 15,000 people from 2006.
- In November, almost 500 businesses attended the annual Agri-Trade Farm Equipment Exposition at Westerner Park in Red Deer. The event attracted more than 75,600 people over four days and brings an estimated \$15 million in economic spinoffs.
- Work continued on the Rimbey Motorsports Complex to complete the dirt oval, mud bog and drag strip. The complex hosts about 10 events a year attracting 1,000 to 3,000 spectators.
- Construction began on a major horse racing track south of Lacombe, although the owner is still waiting for regulatory approvals, licenses and rezoning.

forestry

Several factors converged in 2007 to create a market-based crisis in Alberta's forestry industry.

A slowdown in US housing construction and the high Canadian dollar, combined with export taxes and the high cost of utilities, labour and transportation, resulted in several mills curtailing production, laying off workers and even closing their doors.

In Central Alberta, Weyerhaeuser announced in October it would indefinitely close its Drayton Valley oriented strand board (OSB) mill.



The news came as a shock to the 130 employees, and to the town, which may lose up to 12 per cent of its municipal tax revenue.

Weyerhaeuser's Drayton Valley sawmill will continue to run.

Alberta Forest Products Association reported that the value of shipments from the province's forest products industry fell by \$315 million between January and September 2007 compared to the same period in 2006.

In the third quarter of 2007, the total value of forest products was \$679 million, down 10.5 per cent from the same quarter in 2006.

In the past two and a half years the value of Alberta forest products going to market has fallen by 33 per cent.

Labour Force Survey Highlights

The population, labour force and employment all increased in Central Alberta from 2006 to 2007.

The population increased by 12,200 people, while the labour force (people working or actively looking for work) increased by 12,700 people. In the same time, the number of people not in the labour force decreased by 500 people, indicating that people not available for work in 2006 re-entered the labour force in 2007.

People re-entering the labour force in 2007 resulted in a small increase to the employment rate, from just under 73 per cent to just over 73 per cent.

Of the 12,700 people added to the Central Alberta labour force in 2007, almost all of them were employed (on average). Although the number of people unemployed was essentially unchanged (increased by 100), the unemployment rate declined by 0.1 per cent because of the increase in the labour force.

Unemployment rate

Unemployment in Central Alberta remained below full employment in 2007. Throughout 2007, the unemployment rate ranged from 2.5 per cent to almost four per cent. Economists generally agree that a balanced labour market has an unemployment rate of around five per cent (see graphic below right). Unemployment rates of below five per cent are associated with problems such as turnover of employees, wage inflation and a decrease in post-secondary education as student-aged people take advantage of the job market.

Central Alberta's unemployment rate was lower than Alberta's average of 3.5 per cent.

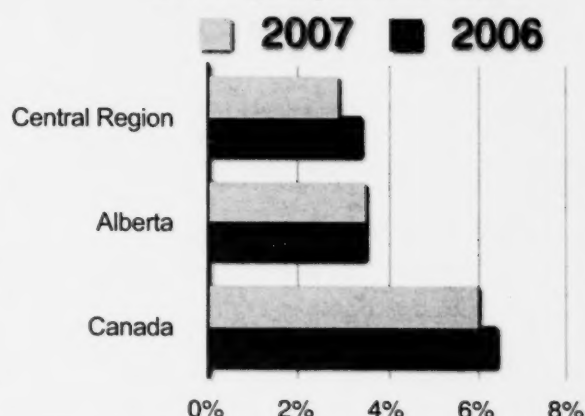
Industry and occupation growth

Over 80 per cent of the growth in employment came from the services-producing sector (over 10,400), while employment in the goods-producing sector increased by 2,600.

The top contributors to growth in the services-producing sector were retail and wholesale trade (6,900), accommodation and food services (2,100), and finance, insurance and real estate (1,600).

The major contributor to employment in the goods-producing sector was mining, oil and gas (5,000), despite the slowdown. Construction employment increased by 1,700 while agriculture employment decreased by 5,800.

Unemployment rates



| REGION | STATISTIC (1,000'S OR PER CENT) | 2006 | 2007 | ANNUAL CHANGE |
|---|------------------------------------|-------|-------|------------------|
| Combined data for the Economic Regions of : | Employment Rate | 72.6% | 73.1% | 0.5% |
| | Working Age Pop'n | 351.8 | 364.0 | 12.2 |
| Red Deer (850) | Not in Labour Force | 90.0 | 89.5 | -0.5 |
| Camrose Drumheller (820) | Labour Force | 261.8 | 274.4 | 12.7 |
| Banff Jasper Rocky Mountain House (840)* | Employment | 253.5 | 266.1 | 12.6 |
| | Unemployment | 8.3 | 8.4 | 0.1 |
| | Unemployment Rate | 3.2% | 3.1% | -0.1% |
| Alberta | Unemployment Rate | 3.5% | 3.5% | 0.0% |
| Canada | Unemployment Rate | 6.4% | 6.0% | -0.4% |

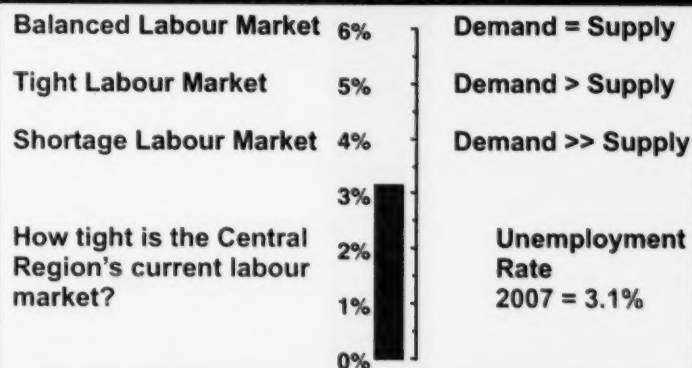
12-month average January 2007 to December 2007

All data are unadjusted three-month averages, except Unemployment rate—Alberta and Unemployment rate—Canada which are seasonally adjusted monthly averages.

For definitions of statistics, please see the January 2006 Labour Market News, or Statistics Canada.

*Unemployment figures for Banff-Jasper-Rocky Mountain House were calculated when suppressed. Source: Statistics Canada Cansim Table 282-0054

Labour Market Thermometer



Resources for Employees

There are many resources in the central region that can be helpful to job seekers and workers alike.

Where to find us

This publication along with other products for Central Alberta employees and employers can be found at employment.alberta.ca/central

Job search and career websites

www.jobbank.gc.ca (Job listings, links and other services)
www.alis.gov.ab.ca (Alberta Learning Information Service)
www.workopolis.ca (Job listings)
www.monster.ca (Job listings)
www.nextsteps.org (Job resources for youth)
www.albertajobs.com (Job listings)
www.hgcareers.com (Job listings)
www.healthjobs.ab.ca (Health care job listings)

Job search and career information by phone

Alberta Career Information Hotline:

1-800-661-3753

Fax: (780) 422-0372 TDD: (780) 422-5283

Sources of labour market information

These websites offer a wealth of labour market information on Alberta and specific communities.

employment.alberta.ca/lmi
 (Alberta Employment, Immigration and Industry)
www.alis.gov.ab.ca (Alberta Learning Information Service)
www.albertafirst.com
 (Business and economic information)
 Central Alberta Economic Partnership
 (www.centralalberta.ab.ca)
 Labour market information across Alberta
 (www.alis.gov.ab.ca/employment/lmi/alberta.asp)
 Service Canada (www.labourmarketinformation.ca)

New to Town?

Past issues of the *Labour Market News* featured helpful information about several different communities in the Central Alberta region. If you're new to any of these communities, see these past bulletins for employment, social services, health care, education and other great resources available in your community.

| City / Town | Month |
|----------------------|----------------|
| Camrose | July 2007 |
| Didsbury | October 2007 |
| Drayton Valley | June 2007 |
| Innisfail | September 2007 |
| Lacombe | August 2007 |
| Olds | February 2007 |
| Ponoka | November 2007 |
| Red Deer | January 2007 |
| Rocky Mountain House | April 2007 |
| Stettler | March 2007 |
| Sylvan Lake | December 2007 |
| Wetaskiwin | May 2007 |

Labour Market Information Centres

Labour Market Information Centres (LMIC's) provide information to help you make career, learning and work decisions. LMICs have books, magazines, newspapers, software and videos about employment-related topics.

There are LMIC's across Alberta. For a complete list, see: employment.alberta.ca/lmic.

LMIC's in Central Alberta:

- Camrose Canada-Alberta Service Centre, 3rd Flr., Gemini Centre, 6708-48 Ave. Ph. (780) 608-2534
- Drayton Valley Sub-Office, 2nd Floor Provincial Building, 5136 - 51 Avenue, Ph. (780) 542-3134
- Olds Alberta Service Centre, 4905 - 50 Avenue, Ph. (403) 507-8060
- Red Deer Canada-Alberta Service Centre, 2nd Floor First Red Deer Place, 4911-51 St., Ph. (403) 340-5353
- Rocky Mountain House Alberta Service Centre, 4919 - 51 St, Ph. (403) 845-8590
- Stettler Alberta Service Centre, 4835 - 50 Street, Ph. (403) 742-7586
- Wetaskiwin Alberta Service Centre
1st Floor Macadil Building, 5201 - 51 Ave., Ph. (780) 361 1272
- Lloydminster LMIC
5016 48 Street., Ph. (780) 871-6445
- Wainwright LMIC 810 14 Ave., Ph. (780) 842-7500
- Vermilion LMIC
4701 52 St., Ph. (780) 853-8164

RESOURCES FOR EMPLOYERS

There are many resources in the central region that can be helpful to job seekers and workers alike.

Information sources

The **Labour Market Information** page on Alberta Employment, Immigration and Industry's website offers links to labour force statistics, forecasts, and wage and salary information.
(employment.alberta.ca/lmi)

Personalized help

There are dozens of programs available to employers. AEII employees will visit the workplace and provide a summary of options and opportunities. For example, they can direct managers to initiatives that will help their business.

For more information call (403) 340-4347 and ask for a Business and Industry Liaison officer.

Sign up free

Labour Market News is available online at employment.alberta.ca/central. Sign up free for monthly updates.

Best practices for business: 2007 recap

Looking for better ways to do business? Great inspiration can often be found by looking to the best practices of other companies.

In 2007, the Labour Market News looked at issues facing local companies and the innovative ways companies are meeting these challenges. Below is a story recap—for full details, visit the website employment.alberta.ca/central.

- **Retention:** Companies are offering things like flex time, job sharing and professional development to help improve employee retention. Some companies are even establishing "sniffles and hugs centres," which are safe places parents can leave a child if they have an unexpected minor illness, like a cold or fever. (February)
 - **Recruitment:** To meet the needs of the city's changing population, the Red Deer Public Library diversified its workforce to include people who speak different languages and have diverse perspectives. (March)
 - **Employee professional development:** Many companies are realizing that offering professional development is a good way to retain employees. EXH Engineering has a Learning/Training Program; Lee Specialties offers financial assistance for continuing education; HSE Integrated encourages continuous training and American Income Life has a Leadership Development Program. (April)
 - **Cooperation:** To compete in a tough marketplace, the Progressive Pork Producers meets regularly to exchange ideas, techniques and experience. Members even share workers to cut labour costs. (May)
 - **Lean thinking:** To address climbing production costs and labour shortages, many manufacturers are embracing "lean thinking." The Lean Enterprise Assessment Program offered by Alberta Employment, Immigration and Industry (AEII), teaches companies how to reduce waste and improve productivity. (June)
 - **Hiring people with disabilities:** With the continued labour shortage, employers are hiring people from under-represented groups, including people with disabilities. By making small changes to the workplace, it's often easier to accommodate people with disabilities than employers may think. (July)
- ### Nominate a business!

In 2008, the "Best Practices" feature will be expanding to provide employers with more great ideas and solutions from local companies. Do you know a Central Alberta business that should be featured for its labour market best practices? Nominate them by sending an e-mail to labourmarketrends@mac.com and tell us what makes that company unique.
- **Aboriginal labour force:** Many companies are tapping into Alberta's growing aboriginal labour force. Four Drayton Valley oilfield companies partnered with Aboriginal Resources, the O'Chiese First Nation and AEII to offer a heavy equipment operator program for O'Chiese band members. (August)
 - **IQAS:** With more new Canadians searching for employment, the International Qualifications Assessment Service (IQAS) helps employers compare a candidate's educational credentials from another country with Alberta standards. (September)
 - **Youth:** There are several programs that can help connect youth with employers, including the Alberta Youth Employment Strategy, Skills Link, the Registered Apprentice Program, Youth Connections and the Federal Public Sector Youth Internship Program. (October)
 - **Women in non-traditional jobs:** With a shortage of tradespeople, companies are recruiting women to fill the gap. Goldec Hamms ran a series of radio ads encouraging women to become welders, while Collicutt Energy Services held trade shows for women to inform them of opportunities in the trades. (November)
 - **Tuition reimbursement:** To keep workers, some companies are going beyond benefits. Home Depot offers tuition reimbursement for employees who want additional training and education, not only improving employee satisfaction but improving job competence and creating potential managers. (December)

